

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

- 1           1.       A method of treating an intervertebral disc, the method comprising:  
2           inserting an introducer into an intervertebral disc having a contained disc herniation;  
3           inserting a catheter through the introducer and into the intervertebral disc;  
4           advancing a distal region of the catheter through a nucleus pulposus of the intervertebral  
5           disc to an inner wall of an annulus fibrosus by blunt dissection;  
6           delivering radiofrequency (“RF”) energy to material of the intervertebral disc using an  
7           electrode disposed at the distal region of the catheter; and  
8           removing the material with the delivered RF energy,  
9                 wherein removing material with the delivered RF energy reduces pressure in the  
10          intervertebral disc to treat the disc herniation.
  
- 1           2.       The method of claims 1 wherein removing the material comprises removing  
2          water.
  
- 1           3.       The method of claim 1 wherein removing the material with the delivered RF  
2          energy comprises ablating the material.
  
- 1           4.       The method of claim 1 or 3 wherein removing the material comprises removing  
2          disc tissue.
  
- 1           5.       The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 wherein advancing the distal region of the catheter  
2          through the nucleus pulposus comprises advancing the distal region along a curved path.
  
- 1           6.       The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 wherein the introducer comprises a needle and  
2          inserting the introducer comprises inserting the needle.
  
- 1           7.       The method of claim 6 further comprising inserting the needle and a trocar.
  
- 1           8.       The method of claim 6 wherein inserting a needle comprises inserting a 17-gauge  
2          needle.

1           9.     The method of claim 8 further comprising inserting the needle and a trocar.

1           10.    The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 further comprising providing the catheter with a  
2   total length between 5 and 24 inches.

1           11.    The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 wherein advancing the distal region of the catheter  
2   comprises advancing the catheter so that a maximum distance the catheter extends from the  
3   introducer is no greater than one and one-half times the circumference of the nucleus pulposus.

1           12.    The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 wherein delivering RF energy comprises  
2   delivering RF energy from a bipolar electrode configuration.

1           13.    The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 further comprising twisting the catheter after  
2   inserting the catheter into the intervertebral disc.

1           14.    The method of claim 13 wherein advancing the distal region of the catheter  
2   through the nucleus pulposus comprises advancing the distal region along a curved path.

1           15.    The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 further comprising heating the material to a  
2   temperature in a range of 45-70 degrees C with the delivered RF energy.

1           16.    The method of claims 1, 2, or 3 further comprising heating the material to a  
2   temperature of 55 degrees C with the delivered RF energy.

1           17.    The method of claims 1, 2, or 3 further comprising heating the material to a  
2   temperature of 65 degrees C with the delivered RF energy.

1           18.    The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 further comprising denervating at least a portion of  
2   the intervertebral disc with the delivered RF energy.

1           19.     The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 wherein advancing the distal region comprises  
2     advancing the electrode beyond the introducer.

1           20.     The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 wherein delivering RF energy comprises  
2     delivering RF energy to the inner wall of the annulus fibrosus.

1           21.     The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 wherein delivering RF energy comprises  
2     delivering RF energy while the catheter is positioned at a location adjacent the inner wall of the  
3     annulus fibrosus.

1           22.     The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 wherein delivering RF energy comprises  
2     delivering RF energy to multiple locations in the intervertebral disc using at least the electrode.

1           23.     The method of claim 22 wherein delivering RF energy to multiple locations  
2     comprises delivering RF energy to the multiple locations simultaneously.

1           24.     The method of claim 22 wherein delivering RF energy to multiple locations  
2     comprises:  
3             delivering RF energy to at least a first of the multiple locations using the electrode; and  
4             delivering RF energy to at least a second of the multiple locations using a second  
5     electrode.

1           25.     The method of claim 22 wherein delivering RF energy to multiple locations  
2     comprises delivering RF energy to the multiple locations serially.

1           26.     The method of claim 22 wherein delivering RF energy to multiple locations  
2     comprises delivering RF energy to the multiple locations using the electrode.

1           27.     The method of claim 1, 2, or 3 further comprising advancing the catheter along  
2     the inner wall of the annulus fibrosus.

1           28.     The method of claim 1 wherein advancing the distal region of the catheter  
2     comprises conforming the catheter sufficiently to the inner wall of the annulus fibrosus to  
3     contact multiple locations on the inner wall.